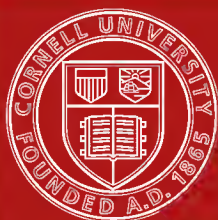


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THE BRITISH ACADEMY
THE TERCENTENARY OF MILTON'S BIRTH

INAUGURAL MEETING
AT THE THEATRE, BURLINGTON GARDENS
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1908
(*The Eve of the Tercentenary*)

LINES
BY GEORGE MEREDITH, O.M.

ORATION
BY DR. A. W. WARD
MASTER OF PETERHOUSE, CAMBRIDGE; FELLOW OF THE BRITISH ACADEMY

SUMMARY OF ADDRESS ON MILTON
AND MUSIC

BY SIR FREDERICK BRIDGE, M.V.O., M.A., MUS.D.
ORGANIST OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY; KING EDWARD PROFESSOR OF MUSIC IN THE
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[*From the Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. III*]

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LINES

By GEORGE MEREDITH, O.M.

Written in honour of the occasion

MILTON

December 9, 1608: December 9, 1908

WHAT splendour of imperial station man,
The Tree of Life, may reach when, rooted fast,
His branching stem points way to upper air
And skyward still aspires, we see in him
Who sang for us the Archangelical host
Made Morning by old Darkness urged to the abyss;
A voice that down three centuries onward rolls;
Onward will roll while lives our English tongue,
In the devout of music unsurpassed
Since Piety won Heaven's ear on Israel's harp.

The face of Earth, the soul of Earth, her charm,
Her dread austerity; the quavering fate
Of mortals with blind hope by passion swayed,
His mind embraced, the while on trodden soil,
Defender of the Commonwealth, he joined
Our temporal fray, whereof is vital fruit,
And choosing armoury of the Scholar, stood
Beside his peers to raise the voice for Freedom:
Nor has fair Liberty a champion armed
To meet on heights or plains the Sophister
Throughout the ages, equal to this man,
Whose spirit breathed high Heaven, and drew thence
The ethereal sword to smite.

Were England sunk
Beneath the shifting tides, her heart, her brain,
The smile she wears, the faith she holds, her best,
Would live full-toned in the grand delivery
Of his cathedral speech: an utterance
Almost divine, and such as Hellespont,

Crashing its breakers under Ida's frown,
 Inspired: yet worthier he, whose instrument
 Was by comparison the coarse reed-pipe;
 Whereof have come the marvellous harmonies,
 Which, with his lofty theme, of infinite range,
 Abash, entrance, exalt.

We need him now,
 This latest Age in repetition cries:
 For Belial, the adroit, is in our midst;
 Mammon, more sworn to squeeze the slavish sweat
 From hopeless toil: and overshadowingly
 (Aggrandized, monstrous in his grinning mask
 Of hypocritical Peace,) inveterate Moloch
 Remains the great example.

Homage to him
 His debtor band, innumerable as waves
 Running all golden from an eastern sun,
 Joyfully render, in deep reverence
 Subscribe, and as they speak their Milton's name,
 Rays of his glory on their foreheads bear.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

ORATION

By DR. A. W. WARD

TERCENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF JOHN MILTON

ORATION BY A. W. WARD

FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY

IN the absence, for a cause which we all sincerely regret, of the President of the British Academy, it falls to me, most unworthy of so honourable a charge, to welcome, on the eve of the Tercentenary of John Milton's birth, the friends who have assembled to honour his immortal memory. There are others—historians and critics of acknowledged eminence—who would far more fitly have occupied the place left vacant by our President's absence; and I rejoice to think that from a poet to whose voice no English ear could fail to listen a message of approval and sympathy has reached us which will be read to you presently. But there is one—no longer among us—to whom I think we would all have readily yielded precedence on an occasion like that which unites us this evening. By the monumental achievement of a long and arduous literary life David Masson has for ever linked his name with the memories which crowd upon us to-night—the memories, inseparably interwoven, of a great man and a great age.

However far, in commemorating the dawn of that 'bright effluence of bright essence' which symbolizes the divine gift of genius to man, we may fall short of giving expression to our sense of its significance, we are conscious that there is nothing alien to the spirit either of Milton's life or of Milton's art in the tribute which we pay—in the acknowledgement which we offer. To his soaring genius the thought of an undying fame and, I dare to say, the desire of it, were habitual; but the appeal which he made was not to the 'broad rumour' of a thoughtless world—neither the world to which he was unknown in the pure tranquillity of his youth, nor that which (with an exception here or there of thoughtful remembrance or lucid insight) hurried past the blind solitude of his declining years. Before the greatest of his works was completed he knew to what height his name would be raised unless the perversity of fate should 'damp his intended wing'; and, when his work was done, his imagination, speeding into futurity

with steady flight, would not have disdained that clear recognition of later ages which comes slowly to the greatest, and imperfectly even to them.

For think of him, if only for a moment, at two stages of his life separated from each other by the length of a human generation, and, as it may seem to a rapid survey, distinct as regards both intellectual purpose and personal aspiration. It was not, as an assumed analogy between the story of his life and that of the life of another of the world's greatest poets (Goethe) might seem to suggest, Milton's sojourn in Italy which separated as by a golden bar the earlier from the later half of his career; for the influence, enriching and refining, of classical antiquity had been strongest on him in the first thirty years of his life, and it lingered with him to the last, though under the control of a yet more potent influence. It was rather the anticipation of his return to England, where a new responsibility, as he believed, awaited him, which caused him as it were to recast the framework of his plan of life and work. But think of him, if you will, towards the close of the first and again towards the close of the second period of the race which it was his to run. Picture him first, if you like, in the spring of 1638, shortly before leaving the rural seclusion of Horton—

By slow Meander's margent green

And in the violet-embroidered vale—

to begin his travels beyond seas. He had crossed the threshold of maturity; behind him lay, far but not forgotten, the days of his unchildish childhood; the grave but not joyless experiences of his London home and school—the house of a father of whom the son could say that between them they held Phoebus Apollo 'not in part but in whole'—the school which cherished the ideals of its illustrious founder and drank in with sound learning a pure Christianity. Behind him, too, lay the seven years of his residence at Cambridge, who (the thought is unavoidable, and most perhaps to some of us whom some day she will fold to sleep in her motherly arms) might peradventure have kept him to her altogether. I feel sure that no small proportion of my hearers were, like myself, allowed to share in the solemnities—not less graceful than dignified—which, when last June was 'clothing in fresh attire' the roses in Christ's Gardens, Milton's college dedicated to the memory of her illustrious son; and we may well take it from the present Master of the College (I only wish he had been willing to tell you so himself to-night) that no transient tempests had obscured an appreciation of the eager but not uncritical student's deserts in the Society of Christ's; and that he might well have become one of

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themselves, had not his resolute ambition, combined as it was with a rare mental balance, left the chance aside. 'There was,' says Dr. Peile, 'a great work before him; he must be thoroughly prepared.' What greater wealth, Milton exclaims, could his father have bestowed upon him than the opportunities for this ample preparation? And so it had come to pass that in the following five studious years at Horton he had grown into that fullness of promise which a sudden summons—'whether the Muse or Love' be the summoner, and to him both had called—can at once quicken into performance. 'My hasting days,' he had written, 'on being arrived to the age of twenty-three'—

fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom show'th.

Yet in this very year he had set his hand to *Arcades*, and three years later he had completed *Comus*, a poem in which the sublimity of his genius already shines forth with unrivalled splendour, while in his hands language passes into combinations—'musical, as is Apollo's lute.' It is at this time that I ask you to think of him, on the eve of his Italian journey, in the beauty of early manhood—with 'fair large front and eye sublime', and hyacinthine locks hanging in clusters 'round from his parted forelock'—riding over from Horton to Eton, there to seek the acquaintance and advice of the aged Provost, whose fame was in the mouths of many men, and in the palaces and along the waterways of many cities. Sir Henry Wotton, as Cowley afterwards wrote, was before long to go on 'his fourth' and last 'embassie'; 'the signory and sovereignty of time' were over him, and death not far distant. But the old man's mind was clear, and his intellectual sympathies were active; and the praise of *Comus* which he sent to Milton after his visit—plainly confessing that he had never before seen anything resembling its delicacy of expression in our language—was, so far as we know, the first which had yet reached the poet from any—may I borrow the phraseology of a later age, for poets were criticised before reviews existed—from any authoritative quarter. The commendation was not rejected by Milton. Seven years afterwards he printed Sir Henry Wotton's generous letter in the first edition of his *Collected Poems*, and he referred to it with just pride nine years later in the *Defensio Secunda*.

The tribute of judicious praise which Milton had received with pleasure in the season when his 'inward ripeness' first revealed itself to him and others, came rarely to him in the still years which preceded his peaceful death. But he then needed no stimulus, and asked for no encouragement. He was not forgotten by the few, and

ready to hold converse with them on what he had achieved ; but ‘all passion was spent’ ; the labours which without that passion could not have been sustained were over, and the sightless eyes were gazing upon things invisible to mortal sight. It is true that in the year before his death he once more had recourse to the weapon of controversy which he had in earlier days dedicated to Liberty’s defence ; but its edge seemed blunted, and his Toleration pamphlet of 1673 was a compromise—though not a compromise with conviction—such as the waves of the nation’s historical progress must in the end break down. How different had been the resolve—not the resolve of a moment or for a moment—with which already in Italy, and after his return from Italy, he had girded himself up for the struggle. Voices have not been wanting to charge him with obliquity of judgement in turning aside from divine poesy to barren controversy. Turning aside—barren controversy ! He knew its barrenness, its frequent futility, and the weariness of soul which is the common meed of those who ‘embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes’. ‘But, were it the meanest under-service, if God by His secretary Conscience enjoin it, it were sad for me if I should draw back.’ Yet, though he thus resolved, he had, as we know, a settled plan of campaign, as I may truly call it, for the struggle into which he had undertaken to enter. The Church, to which he had from his childhood been destined, by his own desires not less than by the wishes of his parents and friends, had his first thoughts as he went forth into the fray ; but from her claims, as they presented themselves to him, he before long turned to respond to an even broader appeal—that of a cause for which many have lived and been ready to die, whose pen, like his, was their sword, yet who, nevertheless, may be reckoned among its self-sacrificing witnesses. To Liberty he came forward to testify under all the chief aspects of the national life ; and, if a bitter sense of personal humiliation such as his proud soul could not bear led him to invert the due sequence of their treatment, the history of controversial literature contains no parallel to the onslaught, in a single year, on the *aes triplex* of social coercion—the marriage-laws ; the stifling stupor of the English educational system which had long plodded on with hardly a glance upward towards great ideals ; and that self-satisfied inquisitorial process by means of which Church and State had long sought, and were now once more seeking, to strangle before it was born into the light of day the reasonable expression of human thought. Freedom was here, as elsewhere, the cause for which Milton strove, and the love of which fired his zeal ; but we at least shall not be likely to forget

his subsidiary argument that freedom is necessary to good letters, and that many a slavish tradition as to the dependence of authorship is contradicted by his pronouncement that the product of wits 'damped' by tyranny is 'flattery and fustian'.

But the height of the conflicts in which Milton shared had not been reached till, undismayed by the tragic events of which England, and his London in particular, had been the theatre, he assumed the whole responsibility of his political and religious principles, and became the public servant of the Commonwealth. No service of man is compatible with perfect intellectual or moral freedom; and, though clothed with the semblance of offensive warfare, his political writings became henceforth of their essence defensive, while considerations of policy, rather than the impulse of advocacy, now formed the primary motive of their eloquence, and even of their many deviations from good taste and its inseparable accompaniment, good feeling. Not for the sake of apology, but lest we should mistake his actual point of view, let us remember that the *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* was not put forth till the event to which it was designed to reconcile the national mind had exercised its profoundly disturbing effect; and, again, let us concede that the answer to the King's Book (so-called) was not so much an answer to a specious venture in spurious literature as a protest against a sentiment which was still a powerful political force.

In an intensified sense this note in Milton's later controversial writings seems characteristic of the most elaborate of them all, the *Defence on behalf of the English People*, in which, as the spokesman of both Government and nation, he had sought to make it clear that for the action of the one the other made itself in every way responsible. As a *tour de force*—I am not at this moment criticising it, but merely seeking to assign it the place which belongs to it in the story of its author's intellectual activity—it has rarely been surpassed; for Salmasius, whose *Defensio regia* it undertook to follow and refute, fundamentally, consecutively, thoroughly, was in his day the first among his peers, and his peers were those great scholars whose labours were regarded by their age as the acme of intellectual perfection. Again, I say, I am not upholding (how could I uphold) the methods of Milton's famous tract; I am not even insisting that, together with a closeness of argument which is Milton's own, we find here a fertility of rejoinder in which he certainly shows himself to all intents and purposes a scholar not less well equipped than his opponent, and, though deficient in humour, anything but deficient in wit. But I am reminding my hearers of

the service which Milton, now the half-hidden, half-forgotten denizen of Bunhill Fields, had some twenty years earlier undertaken, and consciously undertaken, to render to the English people—believing, as he not long afterwards wrote, that the truth, which had been defended by arms, should also be defended by reason—‘which is the best and the only legitimate means of defending it’. Nor can you forget the price he had paid for the privilege of rendering that service. The eyes which he had ‘overplied’ in the task which he had undertaken now began to fail hopelessly; and before he had finished the pleadings in the long-protracted suit he was totally blind.

‘Who best bear His mild yoke they serve Him best’, Milton afterwards wrote in a sonnet of which we would fain know the date; since blindness had settled down upon him for five long years or more before the resignation to the will of God, which speaks from those beautiful lines, had been succeeded by an anxious interval of hiding from the hand of man. Those years had been years of happiness; for happy are they who among the great trials of life and the small—and Milton had his full share of both—without abandoning faith or hope, find in themselves the remedies of which the use refreshes, purifies, ennobles. Probably few periods of Milton’s life had been fuller to him of such comfort as this than the four or five years in which, surrounded by men who were worthy of his converse, and with his loving second wife by his side, he had stood expectant of the realisation of national ideals destined soon to recede into a dim distance, while at times he was lifted, an earthly guest, into the heaven of heavens. The stern nursing of adversity had not yet weaned him from preoccupation with things of State. We may still turn over with a curious hand the state papers which he brought forth with him from the Latin Secretary’s Office—whether by accident or for some special purpose, it is useless to speculate. At any rate, we find him refusing, curtly enough, the suggestion of one of his most valued associates of these days that he shall use his knowledge and his wisdom ‘to compile a history of our troubles; for they seem rather to require oblivion than commemoration; nor have we so much need of a person to compose a history of our troubles as happily to settle them’. For the artist in him could not subdue his hand to whatever he worked in; and as he contemplated the perturbed condition into which public affairs were coming to fall around him, he could not but share the misgivings of wise men of other days in regarding the persons and actions presented to their eyes as petty, ignoble, ‘below all history.’ Among the great projects of his life there was now but one to which an impulse which had at last become

a purpose decided him to return; and we have good reason for concluding that it was some 'two years before the King came in'—a few months after the death of Milton's second wife—that he addressed himself to the work which he promised to complete 'if I have the power—and I shall have the power if God be gracious'.

But, before *Paradise Lost* was more than in part written, events had happened such as assuredly have never either before or since interfered between the greatest achievement of a poet's life and himself. Milton had been in hiding; he had been in prison; his controversial books had been burnt; and with his individual offences otherwise unpurged, he was free under the cover of the Act of Indemnity. Let us pass by other experiences—of the vengeance taken upon the quick and the dead whom he had most honoured among men. It was through a valley thus shadowed that Milton had passed into the sunlit nook of which I spoke, where whatever hazards—plague or fire—might betide, and whatever vexations life's dull round might bring, and though the past and its memories of honour and of shame were to be unforgotten by him, his labours were to be divinely turned 'to peaceful end'.

Paradise Lost, I need hardly remind my hearers, was in no sense the fruit of Milton's old age, as which, if it is thought well, it is possible to describe *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. When *Paradise Lost* was finished, some seven years after the poet had set hand to its consecutive execution, he had not yet reached his sixtieth year; and, when he first resolved to concentrate his intellectual labours upon it, he had only recently relinquished a very varied literary activity. It is well known how the idea of composing a great poem, and then that of composing a great epic, on the particular subject of *Paradise Lost* had been present to Milton from his youth to his earlier and thence to his later manhood; and all the general conditions of the work he had long since in his frequent meditations determined. It was inevitable that a master of so many languages should have acquainted himself with any accessible work in which previous or contemporary authors had treated the same theme; and what they—Vondel more especially, of whom a further word immediately—had taught him, or (as I should prefer to say) the conviction which they had confirmed in him, was that it is both the function and the right of a poet to command his subject instead of allowing it to command him. The difficulty experienced by many worthy people in discriminating very clearly between what Milton found in the Bible and what he added of his own bears witness to the harmoniousness of his workmanship, for, as a matter of fact, it is only the last of the twelve

books of the poem and part of its predecessor which can, together with the luminously expansive *Paradise Regained*, be justly described as a paraphrastic reproduction of the Scriptural narrative. But the unity of impression conveyed by the longer poem also bears witness to what I take to be of yet greater moment—the harmoniousness of the design itself on which the poet builds up his work. Undoubtedly Milton's familiarity with the Bible was such that the whole range of ornament—and it is an extraordinary range—which lies in the beauty of biblical phraseology and the organ-tones of mere biblical nomenclature was at his command as it never has been in that of any writer before or since, from Cædmon to Klopstock, and is certainly never likely to be again in these post-Puritan ages. But what is much more is that the initiated poet's intimacy with his theme, recast as it is by his own original genius, is such as to suggest the same kind of inspiration—I say the same kind, not the same degree—as that which spoke to men through the writers of the sacred books themselves.

The present would in no case be a fit occasion on which to dwell further on a theme which, with one exception (that of the allegory of Sin and Death), is developed in full and natural accordance with its fundamental conception of guilt and the consequences of guilt. But there seems no reason for being overawed by the dictum of Goethe—whose admiration for the genius of Milton was strong and fervent, and who, I think, gave no indication of the sense in which his remark was to be taken—that the subject of *Paradise Lost*, though extremely magnificent, is inwardly unsound and hollow. There might have been some force in the application of the criticism to our other great English epics, where, as in a tapestry-covered antique hall, the eye is content with the magnificent pomp of the hangings; but in *Paradise Lost* the radiance proceeds from within. Still less need we be moved by the warning of an accomplished French critic, that the fundamental conceptions of *Paradise Lost*—in other words its theology—have become strange to us. Were *Paradise Lost* a dogmatic poem, there might be some force in the censure; but even Pope's sarcasm only directed itself to passages—I might almost say a passage—of the poem, and stands in designed contrast to a tribute to the boundless flight of Milton's genius which the conclusion of this very passage signally illustrates. Moreover, were the argument of *Paradise Lost* ten times a mythological fable, it is the poet's own matured conception of the ways of God to man, not a mere inherited belief, which his poem undertakes to justify.

But I ought not to allow myself to be tempted away from the plain purpose of this gathering. What is it—if I may presume to answer, if

I may even presume to ask, such a question—what is it in the labours of which we have been speaking, in their consummation, that seems chiefly to move us, on the eve of the tercentenary of Milton's birth, to add to the wreaths which generation after generation, and century succeeding century, have laid upon his tomb—yet one other wreath, woven though it be

From the autumnal leaves that strew the brooks
In Vallombrosa . . .

In the first instance, the gift which was his in so marvellous a measure that to no other English writer at least, in prose or verse, it seems so distinctively to belong, the gift, too, which from the days of his youth onwards he had recognised as his, and which he had cultivated with religious assiduity, in sunshine and in shade, as the one talent which it is 'death to hide'—till in the evening of his days he returned it tenfold to the giver—how can we better define it than by the one word 'style'. 'Milton,' writes Matthew Arnold in one of the very happiest of his shorter essays, 'is our great artist in style, our one first-rate master in the grand style. . . . His importance to Englishmen, by virtue of this distinction of his, is incalculable. For the English artist in anything, if he is a true artist, the study of Milton has an indescribable attraction.' Wonderful indeed was the self-revelation of this gift to the child; wonderful the consciousness of it in the man, from which no movement of temper and no overclouding of judgement could lead him long astray; wonderful the power with which he could at the last don the whole radiant panoply and stand forth in it peerless among his peers in the House of Fame! His masters and teachers (who happily included one that 'honoured the Latin, but worshipped the English') had judged that whether aught was imposed by them upon their pupil, 'or betaken to of his own choice in English, or other tongue, prosing or versing, but chiefly this latter, the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live.' They had judged aright: the early poems had struck that note of 'perfection' which (as in the terminology of those self-secluded Christian communities to which Milton's thoughts so readily turned) implied the constant presence, the controlling influence, of the ideal. The gift, his most distinctive gift, had continued operative when he had, seemingly once for all, exchanged the chariot of Apollo for a vehicle to which something of the dust of earth is so ready to cling. The danger was near—apart from a different kind of temptation which for the moment I pass by—that the Latinists, from whose mastery a freer method of training had emancipated the English verse in which *Comus* and *Lycidas* were written, would,

though late, assert their predominance over the English prose-writer; but this predominance their influence never achieved, unless it were in his historical writings, where, as we have lately been reminded, he sought to acquire the sententious *Sallustiana brevitās*, which he was unable to imitate more closely than in the form of a certain grave quaintness. In the finest of all his earlier prose efforts, the *Areopagitica*, he sought to follow a model cast in a grander though simpler mould, seeking to adapt to English speech the intense but ample manner of Attic oratory. But, as was most clearly seen when the poetic Muse once more claimed him as her own, the genius of Milton's style was not one which could take its form from predecessors or rivals. Even the verbal texture of what he derived from other authors was transmuted in his hands; besides that in no respect was he more original and more unique than in his prosody—but the entire nature of the service which word or phrase came to render as it gained entrance into his poetry made it his own, and contributory to a total effect quite different than that which it had been in a former phase of its existence (if I may use such a phrase) intended to aid in producing. To test the truth of such a criticism, Milton's method of appropriation—for the term is not one from which a student of his writings should shrink—should be compared with Shakespeare's, and again with Shelley's; and it will then be seen how the originality of his own style, as fully manifest in *Paradise Lost* and its successors, was such that his whole method justified itself. It is almost a pity that the notorious eighteenth-century detector of what he thought he might with impunity set down as plagiarisms and thefts should have mixed up so large an amount of falsehood and forgery with his audacious charge, and thus, though Johnson had been rash enough to imply approval of the outrage, should have come forth from it, in Goldsmith's phrase, as a scourged, and it might be added as a self-confessed, impostor. For a search such as the unthinking well-informed love, but which nevertheless should not be evaded, whether its object be a Milton or a Vergil, was thus diverted from its real issues. Perhaps, as I have digressed thus far from the main tenor of this brief address, I may say a single word on the subject of another critical inquiry—conducted in the spirit and according to the laws of true scholarship, with regard to the actual indebtedness to a great contemporary dramatic poet incurred by Milton in many passages of his own matchless epic. There are beyond doubt many instances in which this indebtedness is not to be explained away, as there is no reason whatever why it should be ignored; but a recent consecutive re-reading of *Paradise Lost* side by side

with Vondel's *Lucifer* has intensified my conviction of the radical difference in conception as well as in execution between the two poems. It is in one of the most dramatically powerful parts of Milton's epic—in the passage descriptive of the 'great consult' in Pandemonium (a genuine palace of the Caroline age) among the 'infernal States'—the Dutch ring in that phrase who could mistake—under the dominant presidency of Satan—Moloch breathing flames of fire, time-serving Belial, and the rest, already in mid-revolt against a Power provoked by their own and their leader's pride—that the creation of another world inhabited by a new race of beings is announced as an opportunity for revenge. Far otherwise—and with far less convincing effect—Vondel represents the creation of Man as the cause of the great revolt in Heaven. I have no right to dwell on this difference without examining it more closely, and therefore I merely mention it as illustrating the rashness of those who fail to perceive that unlikeness in likeness is not the least striking among the proofs of originality.

But, to return, the real secret of Milton's style lies far deeper than any question as to the use made by him of 'pearl and gold'—whether classic or barbaric—showered on his receptive genius from the stores which lay open to him as a student. This secret, known to us all, was revealed by himself without the hesitancy of self-ignorance or self-distrust. The drawbacks of which he may have remained unconscious need not impede our assent to his interpretation of his own strength 'when insupportably his foot advanced'. Scant critical acumen is needed to show where in his prose (for even an approach to such instances is wholly isolated in his verse) he is guilty of stumbling against the silent protests of good taste and good feeling—where he swerves into irrelevant retort or rushes into ugly invective, and often alas! consciously matches himself only too successfully with the truculent gladiators of the decadent Renaissance. But even passages of this kind at times suffer a sea-change—turning as it were of a sudden into a thing of exquisite beauty and celestial loftiness—as, to take a supreme example, where, in the *Second Defence*, he rises from trivial retorts upon More's scurrilous comments on his supposed personal shortcomings to dwell on the single topic of his blindness. Then it is that, oblivious either of assault or of counter-assault, he bows down, in the solitude which was his inheritance, before the Divine Providence whose ways are not the ways of man, praying but to be 'perfected by feebleness and irradiated by obscurity'. Whence, we need hardly further ask ourselves, this power of self-recovery and rising as he returns into himself—whence, after he had in his latter days

summoned the heavenly Muse to be the visitant of his solitude, his power to detain her

nightly, or when morn

Purples the east—

and, as it seems to us, to speak thereafter no words but such as he owed to her inspiration?

Many years before Milton began to write *Paradise Lost* he had in a single sentence, which I should have liked to see written in characters of gold on the ceiling of the hall where we are assembled—itself long consecrate to literary pursuits and aspirations—unlocked the secret of the power supremely attested by that work and its sequel—‘Sion’s songs, to all true taste excelling.’ ‘He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem.’ That elevation of soul, which when in his prose he is least himself, no pedantry of method, no adherence to the scholastic rule of responding by move upon move to every twist and turn of the adversary, no fierceness of partisanship and no fretfulness of temper, can enduringly hide—that elevation of soul which awes us in *Comus* and seems to waft to us ‘of pure now purer air’ from *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*—what else but this is the motive force of Milton’s genius and the chief formative element in the growth and consummation of his style?

We must proceed yet one step further, if you will take it with me instead of resenting so needless a solicitation, and seek to reach the source of that elevation of soul which I believe I have rightly described as Milton’s supreme poetic distinction. In his *Common-place Book*, where the association of ideas is from the nature of the case absolutely unforced, and comes home to us all the more naturally, he transcribes a passage from an old Latin homily headed *De viro bono*—as if he had been thinking of those *bonshommes* of the early Middle Ages, who led lives of blameless purity in the midst of corruption, and for the inheritors of whose traditions Milton had so ardent a sympathy in their martyrdom. ‘A good man,’ we read, ‘seems in a certain sense even to surpass the angels, in so far as, enwrapped in a weak and mortal body, he is engaged in a perpetual strife with the lusts of the flesh, yet aspires to lead a life resembling that of the celestials.’ Such an angelic nature—I do not use the word lightly—was that of Milton, like his own Samson Agonistes :

a person separate to God,

Design’d for great exploits—

silent in childhood under the sense of the call that was coming to him, obedient in manhood when that call came, but even when

darkness had gathered round the renewed solitude of his declining years holding high in his hand the flaming sword which divine behest had placed in it. You have, I know, traced that divine indignation against ungodliness and impurity—an indignation incapable of feeling those hesitations, or consenting to those compromises which the overpowering sense of immediate responsibility forced on even the great ruler whom Milton revered as ‘our chief of men’—you have traced that indignation through the vehement undercurrents which vary the exquisite beauty of his earlier verse, through the solemn reckoning which the poet of *Paradise Lost* seems to lay before us of the struggle of man’s free will against the seductions of passion and of sense, to the ‘sage’—that is, the ineffably wise and ineffably calm—rebuke, with which, in what I will not dare to designate as the sublimest passage of the sublime *Paradise Regained*, the pure lips of the Saviour dismiss the last and the strongest of human temptations—trust in the intellect of man. And you are aware how in the poet’s last inspired utterance, in the *Samson Agonistes*, the indignation flames forth once more, to be quieted at last in the assurance that

All is best, though we oft doubt

What the unsearchable dispose

Of Highest Wisdom brings about.

Even so. ‘Thou hast put gladness in my heart: since the time that their corn, and wine, and oil increased.’ The spirit of Milton’s life and moral being—a spirit which was as little concerned with the cropping of hair as with the burning of books—but a spirit in which there must be something that is austere, something that disengages itself from the mists on the level, something too that is at war with a ‘lubrique and adulterate age’—such is also the spirit of the writings on which rests his conscious claim to immortality. It overflows into his prose, it is the very essence of his poems. Thus, while criticism has tested its own powers by seeking to place itself in a right attitude towards the great poet’s works—and I think that from Dryden onwards no true critic has ever failed at least to see that in dealing with them he was handling the gold of our literature—the English people and the English-speaking world to whom the inheritance of these works has descended are at one in cherishing them with grateful reverence. But the memory of the giver is inseparable from the glory of the gift; and upon you who have met together in the eve of the day when, three hundred years ago, John Milton became part of the life of this great city and this great nation, I call to rise in attestation of the honour due to his venerated name.

MILTON AND MUSIC
By SIR FREDERICK BRIDGE

SUMMARY

MILTON AND MUSIC

By SM FREDERICK BRIDGE

IN accepting the kind invitation to speak on some aspect of Milton in connexion with music, I have thought it would be well within my own powers, and I hope not uninteresting to this distinguished audience, if I ventured to confine most of my remarks to a consideration of the opportunities for music which Milton has afforded in his beautiful Masque of *Comus*. I have for a long time been desirous of putting this *Comus* music before the world in a correct form—and this has never before been done—so I welcome this opportunity.

And as it is to a musician, Henry Lawes, that we most probably owe the suggestion of *Comus*—as we certainly owe to him its first publication—I venture to hope you will think I have chosen an appropriate subject.

We know, of course, Milton's appreciation of our splendid cathedral music, at least in his early days. His tribute to 'the pealing organ' and 'the full-voiced choir' is known to you all. But possibly you do not know how careful he was in this Masque to afford opportunities for the musician.

But before treating of *Comus* may I venture to say a few words on the musical training of the poet? This came through his father, who is proved by his compositions to have been an admirable musician. It is suggested that he may have been a chorister in Christ Church, Oxford, and there have acquired his Latin for his scrivenership and his music. Coming to London, we are told, he had an organ and other instruments in his house, and to the practice of music he devoted his leisure. Masson says 'his special faculty was music', and it is possible on his first coming to London he had taught or practised music professionally.

Six years after his settlement in London we find his name as one of the contributors to *The Triumphs of Oriana*, a collection of madrigals written in honour of Queen Elizabeth, and printed in 1601. Here we find his name alongside such honoured names as Orlando Gibbons, Wilbye, and other 'famous artists', as the editor styles them; and his madrigal is, I think, equal to most of those given in this great collection. There are six anthems by the elder Milton in the British

Museum, and one in the Library of Christ Church, Oxford, besides other compositions.

He contributed to other musical works in 1614, and again in 1621; and all this shows he was in the musical world of London, and his house was probably the resort of many of the best musicians of his time.

He is said to have instructed his distinguished son in music, and to have made him a skilful organist. When residing at Horton, in Buckinghamshire (1632-1635), Milton (the poet) frequently visited London to take lessons in music and mathematics. These music lessons were most probably given by Henry Lawes, who was noted as a master; but the earlier musical taste of our poet was no doubt guided by his father.

I have thought you would be interested to hear this fine madrigal by the elder Milton, and I will therefore make it the first musical illustration of to-night. It is the composition of a skilful contrapuntist—it has points of ‘imitation’ cleverly introduced, and as regards pleasant melody it is much more attractive than many of its companions in the collection. No doubt Milton often heard it sung when a boy. Perhaps I may venture to call attention to two lines of the words, which to me seem a little to suggest two lines that we find in Sabrina’s beautiful song, ‘By the rushy-fringed bank.’ In the madrigal we find—

With velvet steps on ground,
Which made nor print nor sound;

and in the *Comus* song we find—

Thus I set my printless feet
O’er the cowslip’s velvet head.

As the father was so gifted the love of music was very natural in the son. That Milton loved music, and thought it should have a high place in education, we learn from his ‘Scheme of an improved education for boys’, published in 1644. ‘The interests of their more severe lessons,’ he said, ‘might both with profit and delight be taken up in recreating and composing their troubled spirits with the solemn and divine harmonies of music . . . which, if wise men and prophets be not extremely out, have great power over dispositions and manners to smooth and make them gentle.’

We have seen that he journeyed to London to take lessons, and it is to Henry Lawes, who most probably taught him, that I must now turn for a moment.

Henry Lawes was one of three brothers distinguished in music. Henry and William were members of the Chapel Royal, and William seems also to have been a member of the choir of the Abbey, as also

was the other brother, John. I cannot find any certain proof that Henry was a member of our choir.

Lawes was a pupil of a musician who had studied in Italy, and who, having gone out as plain John Cooper, returned to his native country as Signor Giovanni Coperario. Lawes probably owed his tendency to write dramatic music rather than English Church music to this 'Italian' influence.

His connexion with *Comus* is well known, but the matter is so well told by Mr. Barclay Squire in his introduction to my edition of the music that I will venture to quote from it.

Milton and Lawes had already collaborated in a small Masque—that of *Arcades*, in which the Bridgewater children had acted. It was, therefore, natural he should be asked to arrange for the Masque at Ludlow, and no doubt he suggested that Milton should again provide a libretto.

There is a legend that an adventure which happened to Lord Bridgewater's children, who on a journey were benighted in a forest, and the Lady Alice for a time lost, suggested the subject of the Masque. There may be some foundation for this, but it is true that we find the principal incidents of the Masque in the *Old Wives' Tales* (1595) of George Peele, the Elizabethan poet.

There is in this play the sister lost in a wood, entrapped by a magician, and rescued by her brothers, all of which incidents are, of course, to be found in Milton's *Comus*.

You shall now hear the incidental music to *Comus* which Henry Lawes wrote for its first performance, together with other selections by William Lawes and contemporary composers, which I have suggested for the points in the Masque where music is desired.

Much as Milton wrote afterwards, he never wrote anything more beautiful or more perfect than *Comus*.

APPENDIX
VOCAL ILLUSTRATIONS

VOCAL ILLUSTRATIONS

*The Vocal Illustrations to Sir F. Bridge's Address were rendered by Members
of the Choir of Westminster Abbey.*

The Instrumental Music by the Grimson Quartet.

FAIR ORIAN

MADRIGAL FOR SIX VOICES

COMPOSED BY JOHN MILTON

From 'The Triumphs of Oriana' (1601)

Fair Orian in the morn	What lives these ladies led!
Before the day was born,	The roses blushing said,
With velvet steps on ground,	'Oh stay, thou shepherd's maid.'
Which made nor print nor sound,	And on a sudden all,
Would see her Nymphs abed.	They rose and heard her call.
Then sang those shepherds and nymphs of Diana:	
'Long live fair Oriana!'	

MUSIC TO THE MASQUE OF COMUS

No. 1. OVERTURE. $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} (a) \text{ Symphony} \\ (b) \text{ Almain} \end{array} \right\}$. . . William Laves (d. 1645).

No. 2. SONG (*The Attendant Spirit*) . . . Henry Laves (1595-1662).

From the Heavens now I fly
And those happy climes that lie
Where day never shuts his eye,
Up in the broad fields of the sky.
There I suck the liquid air,
All amidst the gardens fair
Of Hesperus, and his daughters three
That sing about the golden tree.
Iris there with humid bow
Waters the odorous banks, that blow
Flowers of more mingled hue
Than her purpled scarf can show,
Beds of hyacinth and roses,
Where young Adonis oft reposes.
(Where many a cherub soft reposes.)

No. 3. 'The King's Hunting Jigg' . . . Dr. John Bull (1563-1628).

No. 4. 'Selling's Round' Arranged by William Byrd (1538-1623).

No. 5. SONG (*The Lady*) . . . Henry Laves.

Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen,
Within thy airy shell,
By slow Meander's margent green,
And in the violet-embroidered vale
Where the love-lorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well:
Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair
That liketh thy Narcissus are?
O, if thou have
Hid them in some flowery cave,
Tell me but where.
Sweet Queen of Parley, Daughter of the sphere!
So may'st thou be translated to the skies,
And hold a counterpoint to all Heaven's harmonies!
(And give resounding grace, &c.)

- No. 6. 'The Royal Consort.' *Andante* William Laves.
- No. 7. 'The Royal Consort.' *Allegro* William Laves.
- No. 8. SONG (*The Attendant Spirit*) Henry Laves.
 Sabrina fair,
 Listen where thou art sitting
 Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
 In twisted braids of lilies knitting
 The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;
 Listen for dear honour's sake,
 Goddess of the silver lake,
 Listen and save!
- No. 9. SONG (*Sabrina*) Adapted from Henry Laves.
 By the rushy-fringed bank,
 Where grows the willow and the osier dank,
 My sliding chariot stays,
 Thick set with agate, and the azurn sheen
 Of turkis blue, and emerald green,
 That in the channel strays:
 Whilst from off the waters fleet
 Thus I set my printless feet
 O'er the cowslip's velvet bead,
 That bends not as I tread.
 Gentle swain, at thy request
 I am here!
- No. 10. SARABAND William Laves.
- No. 11. { (a) 'Jigg' William Laves.
 (b) 'The Mitter Rant' John Jenkins (1592-1678).
- No. 12. SONG (*The Attendant Spirit*) Henry Laves.
 Back, shepherds, back! Enough your play,
 Till next sunshine holiday,
 Here be, without duck or nod,
 Other trippings to be trod
 Of lighter toes, and such court guise
 As Mercury did first devise
 With the mincing Dryades
 On the lawns and on the leas.
- No. 13. MARCH. 'Lord Zouche's Maske' Giles Farnaby (b. 1560).
- No. 14. SONG (*The Attendant Spirit*) Henry Laves.
 Noble Lord and Lady bright,
 I have brought ye new delight.
 Here behold so goodly grown
 Three fair branches of your own.
 Heaven hath timely tried their youth,
 Their faith, their patience, and their truth,
 And sent them here through hard assays
 With a crown of deathless praise,
 To triumph in victorious dance
 O'er sensual folly and intemperance.
- No. 15. SARABAND William Laves.
- No. 16. SONG (*The Attendant Spirit*) Henry Laves.
 Now my task is smoothly done:
 I can fly, or I can run
 Quickly to the green earth's end,
 Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend,
 And from thence can soar as soon
 To the corners of the moon,
 Mortals, that would follow me,
 Love Virtue: she alone is free;
 She can teach ye how to climb
 Higher than the sphery-chime;
 Or if virtue feeble were,
 Heaven itself would stoop to her.

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The tercentenary of Milton's birth.Inaug



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LIST OF PAPERS READ AT THE MILTON TERCENTENARY, 1908

Tercentenary of the Birth of John Milton, Oration by A. W. Ward,
Fellow of the Academy.

Milton as an Historian, by C. H. Firth, Fellow of the Academy.

Milton and Music, by Sir Frederick Bridge.

A Consideration of Macaulay's Comparison of Dante and Milton, by
W. J. Courthope, Fellow of the Academy.

Milton in the Eighteenth Century (1701-50), by Edward Dowden.

Samson Agonistes and the Hellenic Drama, by the late Sir R. C. Jebb,
O.M., Fellow of the Academy.

Milton as a Schoolboy and Schoolmaster, by A. F. Leach.

Milton's Fame on the Continent, by J. G. Robertson.

